

Spotlight

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Human Services Department

Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens

Spring 2004

Cutting Social Security is not the answer



by Mayor Greg Nickels

Last month, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan told Congress that Social Security benefits need to be reduced "as soon as possible" if the program is to survive the waves of baby boomers approaching retirement. Mr. Greenspan's remarks probably alarmed you. Even more alarming? President Bush appears to agree with him.

I do not support any reduction in Social Security benefits, and I oppose attempts to privatize Social Security by creating individual accounts because it trades today's inflation-protected, life-time-guaranteed benefit for an account subject to market risk.

Seniors in Seattle and across our nation have worked hard for their Social Security benefits. They made important contributions to society as family heads and wage earners, and a good number of them continue to contribute through post-retirement employment and volunteering. The deficit should not be balanced on their backs.

Many seniors paid into the Social Security system for decades. Many grew up during the Great Depression and learned how to save for that "rainy day" so they would be sure to make ends meet. However, without Social Security benefits

and adequate pensions, it would be difficult for millions of older adults to pay for their home, health care, transportation, food, electricity, and numerous other needs.

With recent events in corporate America and the stock market, too many seniors have already lost the employee pensions and health care benefits that they worked for and relied upon for so many years. This is not a time for their government to abandon them, too. This is not how we should thank people for their hard work.



Mayor Nickels honored senior volunteers at the Seniors
Training Seniors in Computer Basics Program on September 13, 2003.

Photo by P. D. Lucier

Bush administration policies have demolished a comfortable, record surplus of \$236 billion in 2000 and driven us to a projected 2005 deficit of \$521 billion. To fix this problem, we need more than

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budget cuts. We need fundamental policy changes. Cutting Social Security is not a solution.

President Bush also has reaffirmed his intention to divert payroll tax revenues from Social Security into individual accounts. It doesn't matter if you call the concept "privatization," "personalization," or anything else — diverting Social Security revenues into individual accounts would shift significant risk to the individual and increase administrative costs to such a degree that the financial status of Social Security would be hurt even more.

You may be wondering what you can do on this issue. You can call the President and your congressional representatives and ask them to strengthen Social Security, not undermine it. And don't be afraid to express skepticism if they offer ideas that sound too good to be true. ✨

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Area seniors will take Sound Steps toward better health

The Healthy Aging Partnership has announced plans to kick-off the second year of the Sound Steps, a walking program that encourages older adults to take up walking for better fitness. Last year, nearly 500 walkers participated in Sound Steps at six Seattle Parks and Recreation community centers. This year's program will expand to a total of 12 sites in Seattle and three in south and east King County. Registration (Monday, May 17-Friday, May 21) is announced elsewhere in this newsletter. The program will operate from Monday, May 31 through Friday, October 1. It's absolutely free!

Sound Steps helps seniors incorporate regular physical activity into their lives for better long-term health. Most of the sites will schedule regular group

Irene Stewart named director of Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens



Irene Stewart

"Our goals in this office are clear — healthy aging, independent living, and social and civic engagement. I am very pleased to be here."

In March, Mayor Greg Nickels named Irene Stewart as director of the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens. No stranger to the Seattle community, Irene comes to the Office with eight years of local government experience. She has worked as public relations specialist for the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, as director of the city's Office for Education, and as community relations specialist for the Department of Planning and Development.

"Irene brings experience, knowledge and leadership to this job," said Nickels. "She understands the value of building strong families and healthy communities, and that includes paying special attention to the needs of older people and persons with disabilities across the city. And, she knows how to gets things done."

Before working with local government, Irene owned a nursery and garden center in West Seattle and worked for the King County Council. She is an active community volunteer, and was recently elected to the Seattle School Board.

"I have a passion for supporting people in need," said Stewart. "Our goals in this office are clear — healthy aging, independent living, and social and civic engagement. I am very pleased to be here."

Please join the staff of the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens in welcoming Irene to Aging and Disability Services and the Seattle Human Services Department. Irene can be reached at **(206) 684-0500** or **irene.stewart@seattle.gov** ✨

Sound Steps *continued from page 2*

walks to encourage walkers to stick with the program. Participants may walk on other days as well and will be encouraged to keep a record of their activity to chart their progress. "Sound Steppers" will receive educational materials about the benefits of physical activity and will be eligible to receive prizes to recognize their success.

"The Sound Steps program was enormously successful in 2003, thanks to the joint efforts of the Healthy Aging Partnership, Seattle Parks and Recreation, AARP, and partner agencies," says Karen Lewis, project director for the Comprehensive Health Education Foundation

healthy aging initiative and a member of the Healthy Aging Partnership Steering Committee.

"This year we are happy to expand our support of these activities to even more sites and, hopefully, attract many more senior walkers."

Upon completion of the 2004 program, the Healthy Aging Partnership will produce a "tool kit" to help other agencies, community centers, and coalitions launch Sound Steps programs. For more information about Sound Steps, call Trevor Gregg at **(206) 684-4951** or go to **www.4elders.org/soundsteps.htm** on the Web. ✨

Are you and your loved ones prepared for The Big One?

Geological studies show that Seattle is vulnerable to earthquakes that can cause major damage. But many Seattle area homeowners are not prepared for The Big One, as that future major earthquake is so often called.

A small number of homeowners have taken steps to prepare their homes to better withstand a major earthquake (called "earthquake retrofit"). They have bolted their homes to their foundations, reinforced walls, and secured water heaters. Some have hired a skilled contractor to do the work and others have done the work themselves, yet studies show that approximately 125,000 homes in Seattle and 250,000 homes in King County still need earthquake retrofitting.

The main reason why homeowners have not completed this work is because they lack the funds or the expertise to do so. The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens may be able to help.

Seattle is one of several cities nationwide that has received earthquake retrofit grant funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The Human Services Department, Office of

Emergency Management, and Department of Planning and Development are partnering to help low- to median-income Seattle families get the work done for free under the Home Retrofit Grant program.

Through the Home Retrofit Grant program, approximately 160 homeowners will receive expert assistance in retrofitting their homes, to reduce the possibility of their house moving off its foundation, walls collapsing, and the likelihood of fire due to the water heaters toppling over. The maximum grant per home is \$5,000.

You can apply for the free Home Retrofit Grant program if you meet the following criteria:

- You are a homeowner.
- Your home is within the Seattle city limits.
- Your home was built before 1980.
- Your income is at or below 70% of the State median income.
- Your home has an unfinished basement.
- Your home passes the initial home assessment.



Don't wait to retrofit your home!

"I am very thankful for this wonderful program. I wouldn't have been able to afford the retrofit myself if it wasn't for this grant. It has taken some of my worries away!"

— A Program Participant

Your home is your biggest asset and your family is your strongest value, so why not protect both?

Retrofitting your home prior to earthquakes can save tens of thousands of dollars, promote safety in the community, and help provide peace of mind. The free Home Retrofit Grant is available until FEMA funds run out.

If you think you might qualify for this program, contact Brenda Sevilla at **(206) 684-0567** or **brenda.sevilla@seattle.gov** or go to **www.seattle.gov/projectimpact/pages/pioverview/homeretrofit/HomeRetrofitGrants.htm** on the Web. 🌸

Spring/Summer Special Events 2004

May is Older Americans Month!

"Aging Well, Living Well"

A Celebration of Aging

Tuesday, May 4

Older adults are invited to attend a free celebration of aging in connection with Older Americans Month. Workshops, information, and entertainment will be provided.

Time: 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Place: Seattle Center House, 305 Harrison St.
For more information, call (206) 727-6270 or go to www.seniorservices.org on the Web.

Senior Day at the Seattle Aquarium

Sunday, May 16

Seniors can enjoy lunch and walk through Seattle's world-class aquarium. Admission and box lunches are free. Advanced registration is required. Space is limited;

Time: 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Place: Pier 59, 1483 Alaska Way
Make your reservation starting April 12th and ending May 3rd, 4:00 p.m. by calling the Seattle Parks and Recreation Senior Adult Program at (206) 684-4951.

Sound Steps Walking Program

Monday, May 17-Friday, May 21

This free program offers a safe, fun way to get moving and begin a regular walking program, which will run through Friday, October 1. The program will also be offered at Kirkland Community Senior Center, Highline Senior Center (operated by Burien Parks and Recreation), and one more King County site to be determined. For Seattle events, sign up at any of the following community centers.

Time: 1:00-4:00 p.m.

Place: Alki, 5817 SW Stevens St
Garfield, 2323 E Cherry St
Jefferson, 3801 Beacon Ave S



Loyal Heights, 2101 NW 77th St
Magnolia, 2550 34th Ave W
Meadowbrook, 10515 35th Ave NE
Miller, 330 19th Ave E
Queen Anne, 1901 1st Ave S
Rainier, 46000 38th Ave S
Sand Point, 7400 Sand Point Way
Southwest, 2801 SW Thistle St
Van Asselt, 2820 S Myrtle St

For more information, call Trevor Gregg, Seattle Parks and Recreation, at (206) 684-4664.

Greater Seattle Senior Games

Friday, June 25-Sunday, June 27

The Greater Seattle Senior Games gives adults over age 50 the opportunity to participate in social, competitive, and recreational athletic events. Events will include golf, bocce, swimming, rock climbing, and more.

Time: various times

Place: Ingraham High School, 1819 N 135th St
For more information, call Trevor Gregg, Seattle Parks and Recreation, at (206) 684-4664.

Oldtimer's Picnic

Tuesday, August 24

Seniors are invited to a free lunch, free admission, and a day of fun at the zoo. Space is limited; reservations are required.

Time: 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Place: Woodland Park Zoo, 5500 Phinney Ave N
Make your reservations starting July 14th by calling the Seattle Parks and Recreation Senior Adult Program at (206) 684-4951. 🌸

Aging and Disability Services develops 2004-2007 Action Plan



King County is growing older. As the Baby Boom ages, the percentage of older adults in our population has swelled. King County residents are also healthier than the average American, resulting in several years additional life expectancy here than in the United States on the whole.

Although improvements can be made, King County residents have lower rates of death from heart disease, lung cancer, pulmonary disease, motor vehicle crashes, and homicide, and King County adults are more likely to practice healthy behaviors. Rates of smoking, overweight, physical inactivity, and lack of seatbelt use are all lower here than nationally.

To address the needs of older adults and adults with disabilities, Aging and Disability Services, the Area Agency on Aging, produced the 2004-2007 Area Plan on Aging for Seattle and King County. Aging and Disability Services is sponsored by the Seattle Human Services Department, King County Department of Community and Human Services, and United Way of King County.

The Aging and Disability Services Advisory Council members, service providers, and representatives of community-based organizations helped establish broad goals and define measurable results. Census data provided demographic trends, local specialists offered their expertise, and a series of public forums helped shape the plan.

Following are issues that are addressed in the plan:

Basic Needs

- ✓ Affordable Housing — Demand for housing options that do not cost more than 30% of a household's annual income exceeds the affordable housing stock currently available in King County.
- ✓ Mobility — Transportation is a major concern for most residents of Seattle and King County. Affordability, availability, safety, and alternative choices are especially important for senior citizens and persons with disabilities who wish independence.
- ✓ Access to Information and Services — With growing numbers of seniors, including those with limited English language skills, efficient coordination of resources and culturally-appropriate services are important to ensure that needs are met.
- ✓ Rural Elders — Independent living in remote areas presents special challenges, including access to transportation and services, safety, affordable housing, and social isolation.



Aging and Disability Services Advisory Council

- ✓ Disease Self Management — Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and pulmonary disease are among the chronic conditions facing older adults in King County. There is a need to increase awareness of disease prevention measures and demonstrate the relationship between self-management and reduction of health care costs.

- ✓ Nutrition — Low-income older adults need increased access to meal programs. One indication of nutritional status is whether meal participants consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

Civic and Social Engagement

- ✓ Universal Design — The ways in which we build housing, roads, public buildings, and neighborhoods have dramatic effects on community engagement for people of all ages. Partnerships with public housing authority architects and planners will help increase the design features that meet the needs of aging adults and persons with disabilities.



Advisory Council discuss the Area Plan

- ✓ Engagement — Community engagement is an important aspect of retirement. Steps will be taken to increase the

number of older adults who engage in community life through paid employment and volunteer programs.

Independence for Frail Older Adults and People with Disabilities

- ✓ Family Caregiving — There are ways in which older adults can remain in their homes and receive the care they need. Family members, friends, neighbors, community-based organizations, and paid workers who provide home care need more information about support services, counseling, and peer support.
- ✓ Case Management Services — Communication between Aging and Disability Services case managers and home caregivers can be difficult given the volume of referrals and worker turnover. The possibility for extended after-hours and weekend case management, information, and assistance will be explored.
- ✓ System and Quality Improvements — The report recommends a number of system improvements, including better communication between representatives of the developmental disabilities and aging networks, increased availability of general information and assistance services, and livable wages for case managers and home care workers.
- ✓ Elder Abuse — Opportunities for training on signs of abuse and reporting suspected abuse should be provided to older adults, bus drivers and other service providers, business owners, and members of community organizations.

Aging and Disability Services and its community partners will address these challenges and opportunities to ensure that Seattle and King County are “elder-friendly.”

For more information about the Area Plan on Aging, call the Mayor’s Office for Senior Citizens at **(206) 684-0500** or go to **www.seattle.gov/humanservices/ads/** on the Web. 🌸

Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens Programs



Utility Assistance Programs

The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens can help low-income homeowners and renters receive a discount on their Seattle City Light bill and possibly on their Combined Utilities (water, sewer, and solid waste) bill. Eligibility depends upon total household income. City utility bills must be in the applicant's name.

If your landlord pays all your utilities, including your electricity, your benefit could be in the form of a rent voucher. Applicants living in subsidized housing (Section 8, Seattle Housing Authority, King County Housing Authority, HUD, Shelter+Plus Care, etc., with the exception of SHA Bond housing) are not eligible. For more information, call the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens at **(206) 684-0500**.

Project Share provides payment assistance to income-eligible Seattle City Light customers in emergency situations. This assistance is made possible by public contributions. For more information, call **(206) 684-3000**.

Gold Card for Healthy Aging & FLASH Card

Seniors 60 years and older are eligible for the Gold Card for Healthy Aging, a senior identification card that provides access to many services.

The FLASH Card is the identification card for persons with disabilities age 18 through 59 years old. Eligibility requirements for the card are the same as a METRO reduced fare permit for disabled persons.

Seniors and people with disabilities who have their identification cards are eligible for discounts from businesses and organizations listed in a Special Discounts directory (available at **www.seattle.gov/humanservices/mosc/Specialdiscounts/default.htm** on the Web) and a one-stop telephone and walk-in information service of community resources for seniors in Seattle-King County. For more information, call the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens at **(206) 684-0500**.

Information and Assistance

Senior advocates are available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at **(206) 684-0500** to offer free assistance and referrals to services such as housing, health care, transportation, nutrition, senior rights, long-term care, Chore services, activities, and case management. Advocates will also follow up to see that needed services are obtained.

Age 55+ Employment Resource Center

If you are 55 or older, live in Seattle, and are seeking work, you can participate in our employment training and placement program. The Age 55+ Employment Resource Center, located on the second floor of the Alaska Building at Second & Cherry, is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

One of the resources available to seniors is the Title V Senior Community Service Employment Program, a job training program that provides temporary part-time paid work experience in community services. The goal is for enrollees to obtain permanent employment within 12 months. Applicants must be 55 years or older, live in King County, and meet income guidelines.

For more information about employment services for seniors, call **(206) 684-0500**.

Intergenerational Programs

The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens joins with schools, community organizations, and other City departments to develop opportunities for seniors and younger people to interact, work, and learn together, breaking down age and cultural barriers. For information about intergenerational opportunities near you, call **(206) 684-0500**.

Volunteer Matching Programs

Seniors (& Others!) In Service to Seattle can connect you to a variety of ongoing and one-time volunteer opportunities. One opportunity is the Seniors Training Seniors in Computer Basics program, in which senior volunteer instructors help adults age 50 and over learn about computers, e-mail, the Internet, word processing, spreadsheets, and photo editing. The cost for an eight-hour class is low so that all who wish to attend can afford to do so. Over 1,600 seniors have already participated in these classes. For more information, call Patti-lyn Bell at **(206) 684-0639**. 🌸

The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens' Senior Employment Program, WorkSource and the YWCA work collaboratively to promote jobs for mature workers. Through their efforts, 13 older adults are now working as greeters, providing tours, locating resources, updating job notebooks, and helping with membership cards.

The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens is proud to announce that Greenwood Senior Center, Southeast Seattle Senior Center, and Q-Café are new partners in the Seniors Training Seniors in the Computer Basics Program.

Taking care of our own

By Patricia McInturff

As the local economy continues to struggle, families and individuals with limited or low incomes, young and old, are having an increasingly difficult time surviving.

Fortunately, the people of Seattle live in a city whose leaders take the hardships of our most vulnerable residents seriously and do as much as they can to meet the basic needs of all citizens. Unfortunately, as local property and sales tax revenues dive, all cities across the state are hurting. This means that we must work to find stable funding mechanisms to support needed public services, and we must make sure that the State and the Feds are meeting their human services financing responsibilities.

Seattle began its tradition of taking care of people — and dedicating significant sums of General Fund dollars to human services — in the early 1970s when tens of thousands of Boeing workers were laid off, unemployment reached near-record levels, and thousands of families lost their homes.

Mayor Greg Nickels, who was a Seattle teen during the '70's Boeing bust, continues the tradition of helping people with his four priorities — get Seattle moving, keep neighborhoods safe, create jobs and economic opportunity for all, and build strong families and healthy communities. Seattle is among the most generous cities in the nation when it comes to dedicating local dollars to helping people.

Now two years into his first term, Mayor Nickels has expanded a number of programs to help seniors and their families, including senior nutrition programs; family caregiver support; senior volunteer, technology, exercise, and wellness programs; and support services for low-income elders in public housing buildings. He has also increased affordable housing opportunities throughout Seattle.

This year, the Seattle Human Services Department is investing about \$30 million in social service programs operated by local organizations. In addition,

it is funneling more than \$70 million in state and federal dollars to community-based programs. These programs help people who are old, young, disabled, sick, homeless, unemployed, underemployed, and/or abused by giving them shelter, food, training, and other survival and prevention services.

The Human Services Department is also collaborating with other human services funders and providers to integrate and streamline human services goals and delivery, and increase success by measuring results.

The City is more than just a funder of human services. In partnership with community organizations and coalitions, Seattle advocates at state and federal levels for program funding to support the poor and vulnerable.

Thanks to the work of the City and many others, the state Legislature approved a supplemental budget for Fiscal Year 2004-2005 that will help keep tens of thousands of residents across the state from becoming sick, homeless, or victimized. The budget includes:

- Additional funding to protect case management services so that more seniors and people with disabilities can live independently and with dignity.
- New funding for kinship services to assist grandparents and other relatives who have stepped in to care for children who would be in foster care otherwise.
- Increased funding for Medicaid, community clinics, and hospitals to reduce the number of poor children who could lose medical insurance and help more low-income people without medical insurance get access to needed health care and maintain adequate health.
- Creation of a Homeless Families Services Fund to help families secure more stable housing.

Taking care *continued from page 10*

■ Increased funding for services and subsidized housing for domestic violence victims.

However, there is more to do. Case management for seniors and health care for children — typically federal funding responsibilities — remain underfunded. Federal funding of programs to resolve homelessness is not anywhere near where it should be. Homelessness, unemployment, and other social ills have reached alarming levels.

There are plenty of advocacy organizations with a mission to educate people about the issues and teach them about advocacy, including the

Washington Area Agencies on Aging, the Statewide Poverty Action Network, the Washington Housing Alliance and the Children's Alliance.

The more citizens and business owners join with advocacy groups and municipal governments to promote change locally, regionally and nationally, the more people can be helped, the more problems can be prevented, and the healthier our communities will become.

Patricia McInturff is the Director of the Seattle Human Services Department. ✨

Older drivers up close

By Cynthia Ellison

Older adults are more likely to have a driver's license — and drive more — today than ever before. Older adults depend on their automobiles as their primary mode of transportation for their independence. They can go where they want, do what they want, and connect with the goods, services, and activities that help them to live independently.

Older drivers and safety

Are senior drivers a major public safety concern?

According to the AARP Research Center, persons age 65 and older represent 14% of all licensed drivers but they are only involved in 8% of police-reported crashes and 11% of fatal crashes. By comparison, drivers age 16 to 24, who also represent 14% of licensed drivers, are involved in 26% of

police-reported crashes and 26% of fatal crashes.

Drivers age 65 and over have a lower rate of crash involvement per 1,000 licensed drivers than any other age group. However, when they are involved in car crashes, it happens most frequently when turning left. Younger drivers tend to have car crashes due to speeding or following too close to another car.

Our oldest drivers do pose increased risk to themselves and to public safety. The rate of crashes per miles driven is relatively constant for adults age 25 and 64, and for adults age 65 to 69. At age 70, the crash rate begins to rise. Their risk of dying in an accident is also greater than it was earlier in life.

Causes for concern

There are reasons why older drivers should be cautious about driving. As a person ages, specific functions related to driving may be impaired, including vision, hearing, feeling, and cognitive and motor abilities. A decline in peripheral vision may affect a driver's ability to pass approaching vehicles safely. A decreased range of motion in a driver's neck may impair his or her ability to look behind when backing up. On average, the reaction time of older drivers decreases by almost 40% from age 35 to 65.

The older driver's cognitive skills can be affected by aging. Short-term memory loss can interfere with a person's ability to process information efficiently when merging with traffic or changing lanes. When an older driver performs these driving skills under stressful conditions, their difficulties are magnified. In older

continued on back page

adults, a higher incidence of cognitive impairment, particularly dementia, increases risk of accident involvement.

Environmental barriers can interfere with safety. Highways that separate residential areas from commercial areas increase the complexity and distance involved in reaching necessary services. The design and location of modern roadways can be intimidating to older drivers. The design of traffic signs, small lettering, symbols, and spacing may create a reading problem. As our population ages, transportation planners will need to consider ways to accommodate the increasing number of drivers with reduced vision or reaction time.

Older vehicles may be driven beyond their years of safe driving. The instrument panels in newer vehicles may provide a confusing array of information. And a cautionary note: airbags may need fine tuning so the force of inflation does not break an older person's fragile bones.

Helping the older driver

The AARP Driver Safety Program (formerly 55 ALIVE/Mature Driving program) is the nation's first and largest classroom driver refresher course specially designed for motorists age 50 and older. It is intended to help older drivers improve their skills and avoid accidents and traffic violations. About 640,000 drivers complete the program annually. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia have laws that require insurance premium discounts or reductions in infraction points for older people who take an approved driving course like the AARP Driver Safety Program.

For more information about driver safety programs, call **1-888-AARP NOW (1-888-227-7669)** or go to **www.aarp.org/drive/** on the Web. ✨

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We're on the Web!

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Spotlight

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The Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens, part of Seattle/King County Aging and Disability Services, and the Seattle Human Services Department, complies with all federal, state, and local laws prohibiting discrimination.

Accommodations for persons with disabilities will be provided upon request.

Irene Stewart, Director

Cynthia Ellison, Editor

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